

VZCZCXRO6384
PP RUEHLMC
DE RUEHLGB #0563 1661103
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 151103Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY KIGALI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4292
INFO RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA 0080
RUEHDR/AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM 0889
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1622
RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0229
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 0896
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0251
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP 0042
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS KIGALI 000563

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [RW](#)

SUBJECT: RWANDA COMMITS TO FURTHER JUSTICE SECTOR REFORMS

¶1. (U) Justice Minister Tharcisse Karugarama chaired a June 8 presentation of results from a two day Justice Sector retreat that included 12 justice sector institutions, among them the Ministry of Justice, the Prison Service, the Prosecution Service, the National Gacaca Service, the Military Courts and Prosecution Service, The National Reconciliation Commission, and the National Human Rights Commission. He was joined at the podium by the Prosecutor General Martin Ngoga, the National Police Commissioner Andrew Rwigamba, and the Vice President of the Supreme Court Sam Rugege. Attendees included diplomatic missions, members of the press, and interested citizen groups.

¶2. (U) The Minister offered a three-tiered analysis of the deliberations, starting with the overarching policy goals of the justice sector, including: enhanced respect for the rule of law; the proper exercise of institutional independence; and continued capacity building. Next he reviewed several key priorities for the sector, including: construction of military courts; rehabilitation of police detention facilities; rehabilitation of prisons; focused training for all institutions; strengthened mediation committees (the "abunzi," who handle village-level disputes), and implementation of a justice sector IT strategy.

¶3. (U) Next, the Minister presented forty-four "institutional challenges" discussed at the retreat, including: case backlogs in the courts and prosecution service; non-execution of judgments; poorly written judgments; poor investigation of human rights violations; absence of legal aid for vulnerable groups, including indigents and children; disappearance of judicial dossiers; influence peddling; lack of respect for detainees' rights by institutions charged with their arrest and/or incarceration; and poor popularization of laws, including limited awareness of the scope and definition of the crimes of sectarianism and genocide ideology.

¶4. (U) The Minister in his remarks emphasized the free-flowing nature of the discussions at the retreat, noting dryly that heated debate "was not in short supply" when it came to apportioning responsibility for inter-institutional failings, such as poor communication between the prosecution service and the gacaca service. He said that each institution was expected to frame its own implementation strategy, and that the justice sector secretariat (itself in need of support, he said) would monitor plans and activities. He then opened the floor for questions, which covered a broad range of topics.

¶5. (U) Comment. As regards the judicial sector, airing

one's institutional limitations in public strikes us as a laudable exercise in transparency and accountability. This needs to be accompanied by solid strategies for improvements and be monitored by donor governments. Minister Karugarama is an activist reformer who will follow through on these challenges. We anticipate linkages between the announced reform program and anticipated MCC Threshold governance projects.

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